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KAINANTU DISTRICT, EASTERN HIGHLANDS PROVINCE

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The people of Habi-ina village live on the northern slopes of Mount Piora in the Dogara Census Division of the Kainantu District, Eastern Highlands Province. Like other Papua New Guineans, they possess a rich oral literature and tell each other stories for a wide variety of reasons. All stories are called huri, ~~because~~ but several different types can be distinguished.

Some stories, which we might call myths, have a sacred character and are told only under special circumstances to restricted audiences. Usually they deal with unique events which took place in a remote past when life was very different from that of contemporary times. The main purpose of these stories is to account for origins. For example, when a man and woman are about to marry, they are told certain myths which explain the origins of various customs they will be expected to follow after marriage These stories are told to them separately, in a men's house or women's seclusion house, and are not to be repeated in the presence of young unmarried people. Similarly, at various stages of initiation for yound men and during a puberty ceremony for young women, myths might be told to help them understand various rules they must observe in the next phases of their lives. These stories, too, are restricted to those people who are already at or beyond that stage in the life cycle.

Other stories are somewhat more public, but tend to be told on particular occasions. These tales, which may be called legends, are placed in the past and often involve the activities of individuals who are thought of as direct ancestors of living people. These individuals may be presented as being responsible for establishing certain customs or for beginning particular settlements or lines of descent. Thus, like myths, they may deal with origins but whereas a myth might explain how people first began to reproduce, a legend would account for the origins of a specific clan, or its claims to a particular plot of land. Legends might be recounted as people try to settle a dispute over garden land, for instance, being used to argue that a given clan's ancestor had originally settled on that plot of ground.

A third major type of huri is what I shall refer to as folktales. These are the most public of all stories, often told for their entertainment value. While sitting around the fire at night, children may be told folktales to amuse them. But such stories also are used to teach various lessons at the same time they entertain the hearers. Folktales usually

have simple plots, with little elaboration of details, and they often employ humour to get across their messages.

This type of story can be illustrated with the nine tales provided below. These stories were recorded in 1971-72 and were told by young unmarried men. I had asked them to tell me any stories they chose, and these are the ones they selected. They were originally recorded in the Southern Tairora dialect and in Tok Pisin.[1]

As can be seen, the stories sometimes mix together realistic and fanciful elements, as in "The Man Who Ate Stones" or "Why Birds Fear Men" (titles I have given them for present purposes). Sometimes animals are used to tell a story that could be about people, as in "Why Dogs and Kapul Are Enemies". Whether people or animals are used as the main characters, folktales generally teach lessons about getting along with others, although these lessons are not usually stated explicitly. For example, in the stories given here, "The Man Who Ate Stones", "A Cure for Blindness", and "The Boys Who Killed the Snake" are basically about helping other people, whether such help is rewarded directly or not. Sometimes, as in "Why Birds Fear Men", help is given but due to unthinking reactions of some, such help is not likely to be offered again. Another example of how people can lose things of value by reacting without thinking about consequences or the feelings of others is given in "The Ginger Women". Obligations to others might be stressed, along with the bad consequences of not living up to one's obligations, as in "The Neglected Mother". A similar theme is the importance of showing respect for social arrangements, as in "The Attempted Seduction". One of the most important obligations people all over Papua New Guinea recognize is that of sharing food and other things, and this is a common theme in folktales, as in "The Man Who Didn't Share His Food" and "Why Dogs and Kapul Are Enemies".

Of course, any story can have different meanings and lessons for different people who hear it and in different contexts. I have pointed out a few of the ideas that Habi'ina people are trying to communicate to each other with these stories, but these are not the only ones contained in the tales, and I am not concerned here with offering analyses of them. Instead, they are offered as a small sample of the large oral literature that the Habi'ina people have developed and as stories that people everywhere can enjoy and appreciate.

"The Man Who Ate Stones"

A man named Saavenasau lived in Saavena (a settlement between Habi'ina and Oraura overlooking the Lamari River). One day he was breaking up stones and eating them as he worked. A man from Baira (across the Lamari River) heard the noise and came to investigate. When he arrived at Saavena he saw Saavenasau, whose belly was huge, filled with the stones he had been eating.

The Baira man looked at him and said, "You mustn't eat stones! People don't eat stones!"

Saavenasau answered, "But they are my food!"

The Baira man heard this and went back home.

The next day the man came back. He brought with him a stick with thorns, a pig, and some yams, taro, and sweet patato; he brought all of these things to Saavena. There he made an earth oven and cooked the food. Then he picked up the thorny stick and said, "Saavenasau, stand on your head."

Saavenasau did as he was instructed.

Then the Biara man shoved the stick into Saavenasau's rectum. Using the stick, he pulled out all of the stones that Saavenasau had eaten. Then he gave him the real food from the earth oven and Saavenasau ate it.

Then the man from Baira went home and Saavenasau stayed at his own place in Saavena.

* * * * *

"A Cure for Blindness"

A blind woman of Soamana clan used to hunt earthworms. She would dig in the ground, catch them, and cook them. As she ate them she would tell herself how good they tasted.

One day a man from Taapisana clan happened to see her doing this and he said to himself, "I can cure her blindness."

He went to the forest and killed a possum, brought it home, and cooked it. Then he cut a little piece of the cooked possum and took it to the woman. To demonstrate, first he tasted the meat and said how good it was; then he tried an earthworm and found it not tasty at all. The woman, however, paid no attention to him and continued to eat her earthworms. He tried to give her some possum meat but she declined, saying that she preferred eating earthworms.

Then the man went and collected some tree fruit, some greens, and a sharp stone. He cooked all of these together in a fire near where the woman was sitting. Wanting to help her, he took a bamboo tube and placed the open end against her blind eye. Taking a mouthful of the fruit, grease from the cooked greens, and the stone, he blew it all through the tube and into her eye. The stone cut her eye.

The woman quivered and opened her eye. She looked at the man, who said, "There! I've cured your blindness!"

The two married and settled down at "The Place of Blindness" (as it is now called).

* * * * *

"The Boys Who Killed the Snake"

This is a story about the people of Barant in the Waffa Valley (to the east of Habi'ina).

A huge snake lived in a tree. It was always killing people and eating them, especially people who visited from other places. As strangers they didn't know about the snake.

Two boys lived with their mother in a very high round house (i.e., a house on stilts). One day their mother told them to make some arrows. They went to gather leaves and brought them back for her inspection. She said they were the wrong kind, so they went out again until finally them brought back the right kind. (Once they brought back the right kind of leaves, she could tell them to cut branches from the trees where they got the leaves.)

Then she told them to cut some branches. They did and made arrows with

them. They made many arrows, and bows, too. Then they built a fence, planting posts in a circle; then another, and a third. Inside the inner fence they built a house high above the ground, on stilts. They got their mother and a dog and moved them into the top of the house, and put a stone in with them.

Then they built a big fire. The snake saw the fire and came up to the fence. The two boys saw the snake and started shooting their arrows at it. The shot nearly all of their arrows, but with no success. When their last arrows were finally gone, they remembered the stone and went up into the house rafters to get it.

The snake was still alive, down on the ground. It opened its mouth and said, "You two boys, give me your mother!"

They answered, "All right, open your mouth and we'll throw her down to you."

The snake got ready and they threw the stone down into its mouth. The snake choked on the stone and it died.

* * * * *

"Why Birds Fear Men"

Two brothers made a new garden. One day while they were working in it the younger brother climbed high up in a tree while his wife watched from below. A kaararaanda (hawk or eagle) watched him climb, too, and called out to other birds for them to come see how high the man had climbed. They came and settled on branches near the man as his wife and two children still watched from the ground far below.

(The man had climbed so high he was unable to get down.) The kaararaanda swooped down to the ground and grabbed the woman's string bag in its claws. Then the children watched as the bird flew back up and landed near their father. The birds all stretched out their wings and the man sat on them (since he was too heavy for the kaararaanda to carry him down in the bag). In this way they carried him back down to the ground. As the children watched, the birds let go of their father.

Excited, the children made a little bow and little arrows and shot them at the birds, which flew away.

Now when we men go to the forest the birds see us and fly away. Women can go up close to birds and they do not run away from them.

* * * * *

"The Ginger Woman"

Five young men from Haavira (a hamlet down by the Lamari River) went up to Daandura (a hamlet on the upper slopes, where Habi'ina is now) and followed the path on up to the forest. There they put all of their belongings up in the fork of a tree and went off to look for branches to cut for sugar cane supports.

While they were away a clump of wild ginger nearby changed into five women. When the men returned they saw that the women were holding their belongings. The oldest sister had the things belonging to the oldest brother and so on, with each woman holding the possessions of her male counterpart.

The men asked, "Who are you, and what are you doing with our things?"

The women answered, "We admired your belongings so we're holding on to them."

The men said, "All right, you go ahead and we'll follow you back to our home."

So the women came down from the forest, with the men following behind carrying their sugar cane support sticks. The people in Daandura saw this long line coming down from the forest and watched them go on down to Haavira. In Haavira everyonw watched, too, as the young men arrived back home with the women. Men asked them, "Where did these women come from?"

The young men answered, "We hid away our belongings up in the forest and these women took them. Now we have brought them back home with us."

Everyone agreed that the young men could keep the women, and they all married.

Later the youngest of the men and women had a baby. It grew up to be a big boy. One day the mother left her husband to go to the garden; the boy stayed behind with his father. His father was busy making arrows and the boy kept wanting to wander off. His father frew tired of watching the boy and said, "You're the child of a flower - go ahead and go!"

The boy's mother heard this and said to her son, "All right, you come with me."

His father heard her call their son and was embarrassed. His wife told his relatives that she was leaving with the boy. They got together their belongings and left Haavira. They moved up to Maata'hotera ('hotera place'). The boy's mother set him down at this rocky place and he changed into a hotera plant (a ground orchid).

Then his mother called together her sisters and they all went back to the forest. Their husbands watched as they all returned to their original home.

The brothers held a conference and the youngest brother said, "I was angry with my son and his mother heard me. She called to him and they left for Maata'hotera. There he turned into a beautiful hotera. The sisters then realized their true natures (i.e., flowers) and all left here for good to go back to the forest."

In the forest the five young women changed into garuka pandanus trees and when their husbands went looking for them, and cut into the skin of the garuka, blood flowed. In that way the men realized that their wives had changed into garuka trees. So they returned home, without their wives.

* * * * *

"The Neglected Mother"

An old woman lived alone in Kwaahisora (an area in the kunai, near the border with Ahea settlement; the people of Ahea were traditional enemies of Habi'ina). She made a fire, but it went out. She was left all alone, without a fire, in her house.

An old Ahea man also made a fire and took it with him to his house. He

didn't go inside right away but stayed outside to talk to someone. As he stood talking, the smoke from his fire drifted into his eyes. He set it down and went inside his house to wash out his eyes.

The old woman, having seen the smoke, went to get some of the fire. She crossed the big creek (separating Habi'ina and Ahea territory) and went up to Ahea. There she saw the man's fire lying unattended outside his house and she stole it.

The man came back outside and saw that his fire was gone. He looked all over for it. Someone told him that they had seen a woman take it. He got a big piece of bamboo and said he would go look for her. As the sun was going down he set out, going down to the big creek and crossing it into Habi'ina territory, finally coming up to where the old woman lived. He saw her house with the door closed. Pushing the door open, he shouted, "Where is the woman who took my fire?"

The woman admitted the theft as she sat by the fire. He beat her with the bamboo he had brought with him. He beat her and beat her.

The old woman's son, who was living in Dusapira (far up the kunai slopes from his mother's house), heard her cries and went to see what was wrong with his mother. When he arrived he saw his mother and her condition. She told him that she had taken a man's fire and that was why he had beaten her.

Her son took her with him back to Dusapira and she stayed there with him, where he could take care of her.

* * * * *

"The Attempted Seduction"

Once, when our ancestors lived in Haavira, a young man and a young girl were betrothed. She was preparing a garden for him when another young man came up to her, intending to seduce her. He said, "Who do your hands belong to?"

She answered, "To Saambombaane" (her betrothed).

He tried again, asking, "Who does your head belong to?"

She responded, "To Saambombaane."

Again he tried, "Who does your body belong to?"

And again she answered, "My body belongs to Saambombaane."

The young man went back to his house and composed a song about the girl. She heard him singing and thought to herself, "My parents have betrothed me to another man and I've obeyed their wishes. But now this other man is trying to seduce me."

She went back to her house and told her parents what had happened. Her father gathered up some firebrands and went to the men's house, where he built a big fire. In the light from the fire he looked around and said, "Which of you men has been trying to seduce my daughter?"

The guilty young man was embarrassed and unable to speak. Another man said, "It was my kandere." Still another man said, "It was my son." And so it went, with various men speaking -- all but the young man himself.

The girl's father finally looked straight at him and said, "It was <u>you</u> who tried to seduce my daughter!"

The young man said nothing, but his father spoke up: "Yes, it was my son."

The girl's father said, "Don't do it again! I already betrothed her to another man and now you came along and tried to seduce her!"

The young man was very ashamed, and ran away to the Waffa Valley. The young woman tried to run away with him, but he told her, "You can't go with me. Your father was just talking about you and he was very angry with me. Now I'm running away."

The girl cried and went back to her home. The young man went on to find refuge in a new home in the Waffa Valley.

* * * * *

"The Man Who Didn't Share His Food"

In the time of the ancestors men from Oravai and Soamana clans lived together. An Oravai man named Taraato'a ate some of his own sugar cane without sharing it with other. The men of Soamana clan resented the fact that he had not shared it with them and they decided to get even with him. They asked Taraato'a to join them on a hunting trip. They all harvested some sweet potatoes and headed for the forest.

In the forest they built a small shelter and hunted. They killed many kapul, with Tarrato'a killing two. Then they all cooked their game and put it into a pile. Taraato'a cooked his and told the others to put his catch in the pile with theirs for distribution and eating. They put his two kapul with the others.

When they distributed the game, however, they left his catch out of the division, leaving it sitting by itself. This shamed Taraato'a and he headed back home, going through his garden.

His kandere followed him but when he got home Taraato'a wasn't there. Thinking he had probably stopped off in his garden, the Soamana man went to look for him there. In the garden, on his way through, Taraato'a had turned into a stalk of sugar cane. His kandere came to the garden and looked all around but couldn't find him. Then he heard a noise coming from one of the sugar cane stalks. He cut it and saw blood flow from the cane. Then he realized that Taraato'a had turned into sugar cane. He returned home crying in mourning, with Soamana having gotten even with Oravai.

* * * * *

"Why Dogs and Kapul Are Enemies"

A dog had no firewood and decided to go to sleep. Meanwhile, a kapul collected some firewood and set out for his garden; he took some coals with him to build a fire. The dog lay dozing behind the house, ignored by the kapul.

The skinny little dog was dozing but he heard the kapul leave for his garden. He said to another dog, "The kapul left us behind even though we haven't

done anything to him. Let's kill him."

Later the kapul came back and went into the house. The dogs went inside, intending to kill all of the kapul. They surrounded them and the kapul tried to get away but they were defeated. The little dog killed the little kapul and the big dog killed the big one. The little dog then carried its kill back to its house. The big dog carried the big kapul outside. It was very heavy so he set it down and ate it there.

After he finished eating, he went to visit the little dog and saw that it hadn't eaten its kapul yet. He said, "I'm sorry I interrupted you. I've finished eating mine, but you go ahead and finish yours."

Thus the dogs ate the kapul and, by killing them, made permanent enemies of them and began to live with people.

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